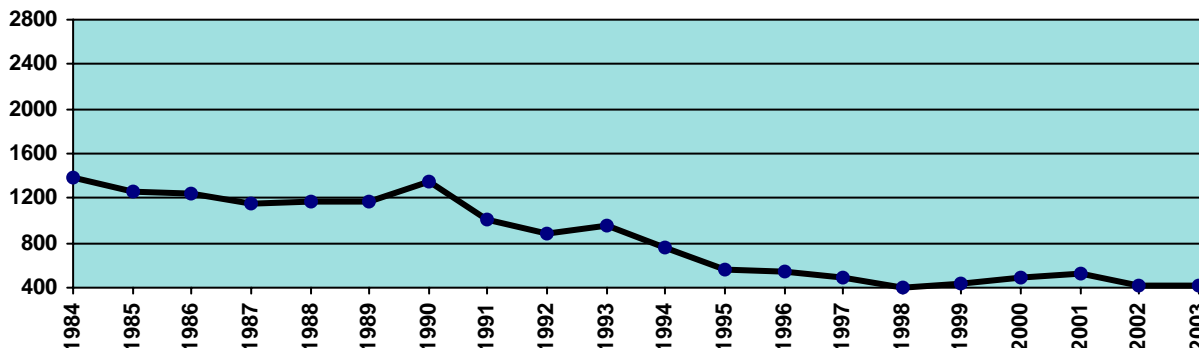


# AUTO THEFT

*Defined as the theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle, this offense category includes the theft of automobiles, trucks, buses, motorcycles, motor scooters, and snowmobiles. This definition excludes the taking of a motor vehicle for temporary use by persons having lawful access.*

**Twenty Year Review:  
Auto Theft in Cambridge, 1984-2003**



## 425 reported in 2002 • 419 reported in 2003

Considered the most serious common larceny, auto theft has been on a steady decline in Cambridge since the mid-1970s. Statistics for auto theft are considered highly reliable, because almost all of the thefts are reported.

In 2003, Cambridge saw 419 incidents of auto theft—an all time second-lowest total for auto thefts reported in Cambridge, behind 1998; and consistent with 2002's total of 425. This is a dramatic decrease from the years when over 5,000 thefts were reported in the city. Although auto theft was steadily but gradually increasing from 1998-2001, this period of increase has been followed by consecutive years of decreases in this crime. How the longevity of this trend will play out is unknown.

Auto theft is the crime in which law enforcement activity has been the most influential. The decline can be attributed to the virtual elimination of “chop shops” and interstate auto theft rings, crackdowns on insurance fraud, advances in automobile security, and new technology that enables patrol officers to quickly check a vehicle's registry listing and determine if it is stolen.

## GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN OF AUTO THEFT

AREA	2001	2002	2003	CHANGE 02-03	% OF TOTAL
East Cambridge	56	55	43	-14.5%	10.2%
M.I.T. Area	17	9	12	+33.3%	2.9%
Inman/Harrington	32	48	56	+16.7%	13.3%
Area 4	74	64	58	-9.4%	14.5%
Cambridgeport	80	56	69	+23.2%	16.4%
Mid-Cambridge	50	29	36	+24.1%	8.6%
Riverside	38	30	33	+10.0%	7.8%
Agassiz	13	19	15	-21.1%	3.6%
Peabody	40	38	25	-34.2%	5.9%
West Cambridge	28	18	30	+66.7%	7.1%
North Cambridge	59	45	32	-28.9%	7.6%
Cambridge Highlands	11	3	5	+66.7%	1.2%
Strawberry Hill	14	13	5	-61.5%	1.2%

This year yielded extremely low levels of auto theft almost perfectly consistent with 2002's standard. There were no real patterns, but certain levels of the city generated more activity than others. Early June saw a burst of thefts, but most of it appears to be unrelated; not the product of a spree.

As is common, the majority of thefts occurred in the lower half of the city, concentrating in high commercial areas that attract vehicles: the Galleria, Central Square, Inman Square, and Cambridge Street. As for residences, the Fresh Pond Apartments on Rindge Avenue is a hot spot for thefts as well. Theft rates stayed relatively consistent for each day of the week, with a very slight increase over the weekend (Saturdays were the most active day). Most incidents took place between the hours of 8pm to 2am.

The top three neighborhoods for 2003 are Cambridgeport, Area 4, and Inman/Harrington. All three are traditionally near the top ranks, however, the significant increase in Cambridgeport pushed that neighborhood into the top three, while North Cambridge dropped 29% (from 45 to 32) to the middle of the pack after placing near the top in 2002.

Cambridgeport reported the most thefts in 2003, with 72 incidents – a 28.6% increase from last year. Cambridgeport's high auto theft rate can be attributed to both its high residential population and to its proximity to the MIT area. Vassar Street, a traditional hotspot, saw nine incidents this year. Also, thefts concentrated along Brookline Street, the 700-800 block of Memorial Drive, Pearl Street and the Putnam Avenue – Chestnut Street area. In keeping with its typical standards, Mass Ave saw 5 auto thefts. The city's major street was fittingly the location of the most auto thefts, especially the 200 block by Central Square and the 2200-2300 blocks by Porter Square. Honda Civics, the city's most stolen vehicle, was unsurprisingly the most stolen vehicle in this area as well.

Auto thefts in East Cambridge have traditionally ranked amongst the highest due to density of businesses, specifically the CambridgeSide Galleria. In 2003, East Cambridge witnessed a total of 43 thefts. The hotspots of Fifth and Sixth Streets did not emerge this year, as incidents were scattered throughout the neighborhood but focused on parking areas near the Galleria.

Inman/Harrington saw an increase in this crime for the second consecutive year. The block of 1100 Cambridge Street was especially heavily targeted.

It is important to note the significant decreases for some neighborhoods this year. North Cambridge, Peabody and Strawberry Hill reported the highest decreases in the city. Strawberry Hill's decrease may be attributed to 2002's status as a relatively active year for auto thefts in the usually quiet neighborhood. The neighborhood tied with the Cambridge Highlands for fewest thefts this year with only five, a 61.5% decrease. Auto thefts in this neighborhood tend to be focused on Huron Avenue, but that street saw only one such crime in 2003, while St. Sauveur Court was struck twice.

The decrease in North Cambridge auto thefts was largely due to a decrease in thefts in the parking lots along Rindge Avenue. Only eight such incidents took place in 2003, although the parking lots at the 300 block of Rindge, across from Daney Park, continue to be the major hotspot in the neighborhood, with 5 of the 32 thefts.

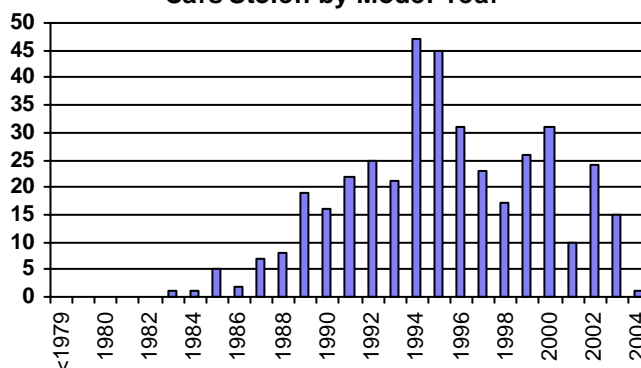
## Top Ten Makes & Models Stolen

Makes		Models	
Honda	113	Honda Civic*+	60
Toyota	46	Honda Accord*+	49
Ford	37	Acura Integra+	26
Acura	32	Toyota Camry+	24
Dodge	16	Toyota Corolla*+	10

\*Also in the National Top Five

+Also in the Massachusetts Top Five

## Cars Stolen by Model Year



Hondas and Toyotas continue to dominate the field as the most stolen vehicles. The two makes accounted for 38% of all stolen vehicles, a fairly consistent percentage. Hondas alone constituted a whopping 27% of all cars stolen in the city. The most targeted model this year was the Honda Civic, followed by the Accord and the Acura Integra. The Toyota Camry, traditionally a commonly stolen model, was just behind the Integra. These particular models are stolen more than any other due to several factors. These cars are some of the most commonly *owned* models in the nation, making them more widely available. Statistical probability alone would place them near the top of the theft list. Also, car thieves tend to look for average-cost, commonly owned, inconspicuous cars. High-priced luxury cars are not stolen very often because they are too easy for someone to spot, and are more likely to be equipped with expensive alarm systems. Scooters have also become a more common vehicle stolen, as they have grown in popularity in recent years. Not yet a pattern, but notable.

Analysis of theft by model year works the same way. Highest in demand are cars that are eight to nine years old. Thieves looking for transportation steal these cars because they are inconspicuous. Thieves looking to make a profit target these years because parts for these cars are in higher demand. The second peak, with 1999-2002 cars, represents "joyriders," looking for newer models to increase their sense of status, and thieves intending to sell the entire car for profit.

## Auto Theft Recoveries

As of this report, 237, or 56%, of the 419 automobiles stolen in 2003 have been recovered. A plurality was made the day after the theft, and the vast majority was made less than a week later. Boston and Cambridge tied for the most (77) recoveries, followed by Somerville with an unusually high 35.

Most recovered vehicles show damage to one of the doors and to the ignition or steering column. About half of the recovered vehicles have items missing, such as the stereo, a car phone, or other items left in the car.

The table below shows the number of vehicles stolen in Cambridge and recovered in each city or town that reported at least two recoveries.

<b>Boston</b>	<b>77</b>
East Boston	2
Allston/Brighton	4
Back Bay/Fenway	0
South Boston	1
Roxbury	3
Dorchester	10
Mattapan	1
West Roxbury/Jamaica Plain	1
Hyde Park	0
Roslindale	0
Unknown	55
<b>Cambridge</b>	<b>77</b>
East Cambridge	4
MIT Area	1
Inman/Harrington	13
Area 4	8
Cambridgeport	17
Mid-Cambridge	4
Riverside	6
Agassiz	3
Peabody	3
West Cambridge	5
North Cambridge	4
Cambridge Highlands	3
Strawberry Hill	2
Unknown	4
<b>Other Cities</b>	<b>83</b>
Arlington	4
Chelsea	2
Somerville	35
Malden	3
Medford	4
Revere	3
Other	32

Six recoveries were made outside of metro Boston: two in New York, and one each in Providence, Chicopee (MA), Coventry (RI), Louisiana and South Carolina.

## Preventing Auto Theft

These are some tips to help reduce and prevent the incidence of auto theft. (List is provided courtesy of [Autotheftinfo.com](http://Autotheftinfo.com))

- **Always take your keys.** Never leave them in the car. Nearly 20% of all vehicles stolen had the keys in them.
- **Always lock your car.** Approximately 50% of all vehicles stolen were left unlocked.
- **Never hide a second set of keys in your car.** Extra keys can easily be found if a car thief takes time to look.
- **Park in well-lit areas.** Over half of all vehicle thefts occur at night.
- **Park in attended lots.** Auto thieves tend to avoid potential witnesses and prefer unattended parking lots.
- **If you park in an attended lot, leave only the ignition/door key.** If your trunk and glove box use the same key as the door, have one of them changed. Don't give the attendant easy access to your glove box and trunk. Upon returning, check the tires, spare and battery to insure they are the same as those you had when you parked.
- **Never leave your car running, even if you will only be gone for a minute.** Vehicles are commonly stolen at convenience stores, gas stations, ATM's, etc. Many vehicles are also stolen on cold mornings when the owner leaves the vehicle running to warm up.
- **Don't leave valuables in plain view.** Don't make your car a more desirable target by leaving valuables in plain sight.
- **When parking in a garage, lock the garage door and your vehicle.** By locking both the garage and vehicle doors, the chances of deterring a thief greatly improve.
- **Don't leave the registration or title in your car.** A car thief will use these to sell your stolen car. File the title at your home or office, and carry registration in your purse or wallet.
- **Vehicle Identification Number (VIN).** Stolen cars/parts are more easily traced when vehicle VIN numbers have been etched on car windows and major parts. ID stickers (<http://www.IDsticker.com>) include VINs and can assist police in identifying your vehicle in the event that it is stolen.
- **Alarms.** Loud warnings sound when doors/hood/trunk are opened. Optional sensors include glass breakage, motion, tampering and towing. Panic buttons, back-up batteries, flashing parking lights or headlights, and automatic engine disable features are also recommended.

## Auto Theft 2003

